

# CALIFORNIA

## OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

### MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTIONISTS

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INTEREST AREA  
CONVENTIONAL



#### WHAT DOES A MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTIONIST DO?

MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTIONISTS, also called *medical transcribers* and *medical stenographers*, listen to recordings dictated into a voice recorder by physicians and other healthcare professionals and transcribe them into medical reports and correspondence. They listen to recordings on a special headset and use a foot pedal to pause the recording when necessary. (Adaptive equipment is available for individuals who are physically unable to use a foot pedal.) Transcriptionists key the text into a personal computer or word processor, editing as necessary for grammar and clarity. The documents they produce include discharge summaries, history and physical examination reports, operating room reports, consultation reports, autopsy reports, diagnostic imaging studies, and

referral letters. Medical Transcriptionists return transcribed documents to the dictator for review and signature, or correction.

Medical Transcriptionists must understand medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, diagnostic procedures, and treatment, to accurately transcribe dictated reports into a format that is clear and understandable for the reader. They also must be able to translate medical jargon and abbreviations into their full written-out forms. To help identify terms appropriately, Transcriptionists refer to standard medical reference materials – such as medical dictionaries, a drug reference, and sources on anatomy to aid them with the preparation of final patient records. Medical Transcriptionists must comply with specific standards that apply to the style of medical records, including the legal requirements involved with keeping patient records confidential.

Experienced Transcriptionists are able to identify mistakes or inconsistencies in a medical report and check back with the dictator to correct the information. Their ability to correctly transcribe patient assessments and treatments reduces the chance of patients' receiving ineffective treatments and ensures high quality patient care. Also, transcribed documents eventually become part of patients' permanent files.

Medical Transcriptionists perform the following tasks:

- Transcribe dictated report and practitioner's diagnosis and recommendations into patient's medical record.
- Compile and record medical charts, reports, and correspondence, using a personal computer.
- Listen to dictation and compare it to computer-generated text, formatting and editing as necessary for grammar and clarity, and bringing discrepancies to the attention of the originator for clarification.

- Use transcribing machines with headset and foot pedal to listen to recordings by physicians, dictating a variety of medical reports.
- Edit reports as necessary for clearness.
- Transmit correspondence and medical records by mail, e-mail, fax, or via computer software programs designed to transfer information to and from computers at different locations.

### WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT?

Important skills, knowledge, and abilities for Medical Transcriptionists include:

- English Language – Knowledge of the structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.
- Oral Comprehension – The ability to listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
- Reading Comprehension – Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work-related documents.
- Active Listening – Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
- Writing – Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.
- Clerical – Knowledge of administrative and clerical procedures and systems such as word processing, managing files and records, stenography and transcription, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.
- Wrist-Finger Speed – The ability to make fast, simple, repeated movements of the fingers, hands, and wrists.
- Oral Expression – The ability to communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
- Written Comprehension – The ability to read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
- Medical Terminology – Knowledge of medical terms used by health care professionals.

### WHAT'S THE WORK ENVIRONMENT?

The majority of Transcriptionists work in comfortable office settings such as hospitals, physicians' offices, clinics, laboratories, medical libraries, pharmaceutical companies, medical transcription service firms, or at home. They generally work alone at individual workstations. Transcription work requires long hours of sitting and an intense degree of concentration.

An increasing number of Medical Transcriptionists telecommute from home as employees or subcontractors for hospitals and transcription services or as self-employed contractors.

This occupation exposes employees to very few hazards. However, there are risks for eye problems due to strain and repetitive motion injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Some employers set production standards and determine pay rates based on work production, which could be stressful.

### Union Membership

Presently, there has been little or no unionization of Medical Transcriptionists.

### WHAT'S THE CALIFORNIA JOB OUTLOOK?

The following information is from the occupational projections produced by the Employment Development Department (EDD) Labor Market Information Division (LMID):

#### Medical Transcriptionists

Estimated number of workers in 2002:	8,100
Estimated number of workers in 2012:	9,400
Projected Growth 2002-2012:	16.0%
Est. openings due to separations by 2012:	1,500

*These figures do not include self-employment.*

This occupation will grow slower than average compared with all occupations in California.

There will be a total of 2,800 job opportunities in this occupation during the projections period.

### ***Trends***

With the emergence of Internet technology, Transcriptionists increasingly receive dictation over the Internet and return transcribed documents to clients for approval via the Internet. Many people have privacy concerns regarding the transmission of personal medical records over the Internet. The U.S. passed a large healthcare law in 1996 called the "Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act" (HIPAA). Effective April 2003, the law requires the healthcare industry to protect patient records that contain individually identifiable health information. The law does not indicate what type of technology should be used to protect the privacy of health information that is transmitted over the Internet. However, there are a variety of encryption and cryptographic products available. Use of the Internet will become more prevalent as security concerns are resolved.

Another emerging trend is the use of speech recognition technology. Speech recognition technology electronically translates speech into text and generates draft reports. Transcriptionists then listen to dictation while comparing and editing the machine-created drafts. Speech recognition software is unable to perfectly interpret all of the different variances of the human voice and the complexities of the English language. Transcriptionists will still be needed to identify grammatical and medical errors, and properly format reports according to the employer's specifications. The advancement of speech recognition technology is not expected to negatively impact the demand for Medical Transcriptionists.

### **WHAT DOES THE JOB PAY?**

#### ***California Earnings***

The following information is from the Occupational Employment Statistics Survey of Employers by EDD/LMID:

#### **Medical Transcriptionists 2005 Wages**

Hourly wages range from	\$14.38	to	\$20.25
Average hourly wage	\$17.14		
Average annual wage	\$35,646		

*These figures do not include self-employment.*

Self-employed Transcriptionists are generally paid by line count rather than on an hourly basis, usually based on 60 characters per line.

### ***Hours***

Full time Medical Transcriptionists working as employees of hospitals, physicians' offices, or clinics, work a 40-hour, five-day workweek. Some hospitals may assign swing or graveyard shifts. Self-employed Medical Transcriptionists are more likely to work flexible hours set by themselves.

### ***Benefits***

Transcriptionists may expect to receive medical insurance, vacation, sick leave benefits, and retirement plans. However, self-employed Transcriptionists do not receive these benefits.

### **HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE JOB?**

#### ***Education and Training***

Many employers prefer to hire Transcriptionists who have completed a two-year associate degree or one-year certificate program offered by community colleges or vocational schools. Coursework should include advanced English grammar and punctuation, anatomy, physiology, disease processes, pharmacology, laboratory medicine, beginning and advanced medical language, healthcare records, medical legal issues, and computer software technology. Use [www.cpec.ca.gov/collegeguide/collegeguide.asp](http://www.cpec.ca.gov/collegeguide/collegeguide.asp) to locate educational programs for Medical Transcription.

#### ***Licensing and Certification***

The American Association for Medical Transcription (AAMT) conducts a voluntary certification program. Those Transcriptionists who successfully complete both Part I (written) and Part II (practical) of the certification exam are recognized as Certified Medical Transcriptionists (CMT) and may use the CMT title.

#### ***Continuing Education***

It is very important for Medical Transcriptionists to refresh their grammar and punctuation skills and

keep abreast of technological and various computer software changes. Certification is voluntary. However, to maintain certification CMTs must complete at least 30 continuing education credits during a three-year continuing education cycle. The CMTs must record and submit continuing education activities to the AAMT (refer to Other Sources of Information) prior to the end of the three-year recertification cycle.

## HOW DO I FIND THE JOB?

Community college job placement offices, Medical Transcriptionist training providers, and vocational schools are excellent work search resources for job seekers.

Direct application to employers remains one of the most effective job search methods. Most Medical Transcriptionists are employed at hospitals or physicians' offices.

Search these **yellow page** headings for listings of private firms:

- Clinics
- Hospitals
- Laboratories, Medical
- Medical Transcription Services
- Physicians and Surgeons M.D.
- Secretarial Service
- Transcribing Services

The following Internet resources can be helpful to the job search process:

America's Career InfoNet  
[www.acinet.org](http://www.acinet.org)

America's Job Bank  
[www.ajb.dni.us](http://www.ajb.dni.us)

CalJOBS<sup>SM</sup>  
[www.caljobs.ca.gov](http://www.caljobs.ca.gov)

Job Search and Resume Writing  
[www.worksmart.ca.gov/success\\_tips\\_menu.html](http://www.worksmart.ca.gov/success_tips_menu.html)

Local Job Service Offices  
[www.edd.ca.gov/jsrep/jsloc.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/jsrep/jsloc.htm)

Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) Online  
<http://online.onetcenter.org>

One-Stop Career Centers List  
[www.edd.ca.gov/ONE-STOP/pic.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/ONE-STOP/pic.htm)

For statewide and local projections, wages, employers by county, and other occupational information go to [www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov](http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov) and select *Find an Occupation Profile*.

## WHERE CAN THE JOB LEAD?

Experienced Medical Transcriptionists may promote to home-based work, supervisory, management, or teaching positions. Transcriptionists may also elect to become self-employed as independent contractors, consultants, or owners of medical transcription services. Entry into self-employment usually requires initial set up expenditures for transcription and computer equipment including high-speed computer lines with Internet access. Transcriptionists also need access to reference materials such as an English dictionary, medical dictionary, a drug reference and other sources on anatomy to aid them with the preparation of patient records. Some of these reference materials are available on the Internet. Although set up expenses are involved, self-employment generally offers more opportunities to set flexible working hours that adapt to personal or family obligations.

With additional education and training, Transcriptionists may also advance to medical records and health information technicians, medical coders, or medical records and health information administrators.

## OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

American Association for Medical Transcription  
100 Sycamore Ave  
Modesto, CA 95354-0550  
(800) 982-2182  
(800) 578-9823 (Certification only)  
[www.aamt.org](http://www.aamt.org)

California Association for Medical Transcription  
[www.caamt.homestead.com/files/index.html](http://www.caamt.homestead.com/files/index.html)

**RELATED OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES**

Stenographers	No. 25
Medical Record/Health Information Technicians and Administrators	No. 134
Court and Shorthand Reporters	No. 162

**OCCUPATIONAL CODE REFERENCES**

**SOC** (*Standard Occupational Classification*)  
Medical Transcriptionists 31-9094

**O\*NET** (*Occupational Information Network*)  
Medical Transcriptionists 31-9094.00

**OES** (*Occupational Employment Statistics*)  
Stenographers and/or Court Reporters 55302